



Oral Health Parent Focus Group Results

Goal #1: To gain a better understanding of parent's knowledge attitudes and beliefs about oral health.

Goal #2: To gain a better understanding of why parents do not take their children to the dentist.

Goal #3: To test oral health promotion messages with parents.

The Grant County Health District conducted 3 focus groups. The first group was with Even Start parents in Royal City and was conducted in Spanish. The next group was in Moses Lake with Head Start families, and was conducted in English. The final focus group was with a playgroup in Ephrata and was conducted in English. The groups were selected to give the health district a cross section view of the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of parents with young children on oral health issues.

English Groups

Baby's Teeth

“When we say, ‘baby’s teeth’, what comes to mind?”

The participants associated baby's teeth with infants and teething. No mention of older children and "baby teeth". Both English groups discussed teething home remedies and when to start using toothbrushes.

“Are baby’s teeth as important as adult teeth? Explain why or why not.”

A majority of the participants felt "baby's teeth" were as important as adult teeth. Nearly a third felt baby's teeth were not quite as important. Several spoke of setting good habits for life early. One group discussed that children see the habits of parents.

“When should parents start brushing their baby’s teeth?”

The participants stated either starting at birth or as soon as teeth appear. Those that stated, "As soon as teeth appear." were shocked to hear, "Starting at birth." Both groups had discussions about using wash cloths and burp rags to wipe baby's gums.



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English Groups

Fluoride and Brushing

“What is fluoride?”

Common responses were vitamin, mineral, chemical or additive. The majority of participants were not sure what fluoride was. They discussed if fluoride is found in water naturally or added. They discussed where fluoride is found, prescription pills, over-the-counter rinses, toothpaste.

“Why is fluoride important for your family’s teeth?”

The participants felt fluoride prevented tooth decay and made teeth stronger. They were unsure if all toothpaste had it and at what age to start using fluoride toothpaste. They also felt that using fluoride now would save money on future dentist bills.

“When should we brush our teeth?”

The majority of parents felt that we should try to brush our teeth at least two times a day. Several felt two times a day is ideal but not realistic. A small number felt after sugary foods.

“When should our children brush their teeth?”

The majority felt the same as adults, two times a day. A small number felt after each meal is ideal when possible. They felt parents need to check and rebrush missed teeth. Night time brushing is very important, but often missed.

Dental Visits

When should parents take their child to a dentist?

The participants had mixed opinions on when a child should see a dentist. Responses ranged from when first teeth come in, 6 months, 1 year and 3 years old. They felt their responses varied because recommendations from dentists and dental programs also vary. There was some agreement that children didn’t have to go as often as they get older.

How often should parents take their child to the dentist for check ups?

The frequency ranged from 4 to 6 months. A few participants felt it depended on how much sugar they eat and if the child has “bad” teeth.



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English Groups

Do you have a family dentist?

Several participants said they do not have a family dentist. Their reasons for not have a family dentist were: depends on who has openings, and parents and children see different dentists.

In your opinion, what should we say to parents to encourage them to take their child to the dentist for check ups?

Themes heard:

- Tell parents: "you don't want your child to hurt".
- Use graphic pictures of tooth decay. One participant said, "All the brochures show healthy smiles. Parents need to see cavities."
- Be very specific.
- Seeing a dentist is cost effective. Preventive check ups are cheaper than tooth repair.
- Parents need to make dental check ups a priority – currently they are not as important as well child exams. Explain to parents why it is as important as a well child exam.

We asked parents to rank the following with 1 being the best and 5 being the worst.

Please tell us which of the following is a good way to communicate with parents?

1 = 😊 3 = 😐 5 = ☹️

Ranked 1 or 2

5/11 Flyers sent home with children
 3/11 Brochures in public offices
 2/11 Radio advertisements
 2/11 School newsletters
 1/11 Newspaper

Ranked 4 or 5

1/11 Flyers sent home with children
 2/11 School newsletters
 3/11 Brochures in public offices
 3/11 Newspaper
 4/11 Radio advertisements

Conclusions:

There is no clear method for sending information home with students. There is a slightly better chance of reaching parents with a flyer sent home with children or a brochure in a public office. Radio and newspapers do not appear to be a top method for reaching parents.



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English Groups

Please tell us which of the following statements you like the most.

1 = 😊 3 = 😐 5 = ☹️

Ranked 1 or 2

7/11 Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.

1/11 Protect your baby's smile with fluoride.

6/11 Protect your baby's teeth by brushing them with fluoride toothpaste.

Ranked 4 or 5

1/11 Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.

4/11 Protect your baby's smile with fluoride.

0/11 Protect your baby's teeth by brushing them with fluoride toothpaste.

Conclusions:

There was a slight preference for the 3rd statement, Project your baby's teeth by brushing them with fluoride toothpaste. Clearly the parents did not like the statement which included protecting the baby's smile.

Please tell us which of the following you like the most.

1 = 😊 3 = 😐 5 = ☹️

Ranked 1 or 2

5/11 Take your child to the dentist for a check up at least once a year.

7/11 Don't wait until your child's mouth hurts. Take your child to the dentist for regular check ups.

Ranked 4 or 5

0/11 Take your child to the dentist for a check up at least once a year.

1/11 Don't wait until your child's mouth hurts. Take your child to the dentist for regular check ups.

Conclusions:

There was a slight preference for the second statement, "don't wait until your child's mouth hurts". Take your child to the dentist for regular check ups.

Booklet: *A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby (italics added)*

What did you like most about it?

Participants felt it was clear and simple messages.

What did you like least about it?

Several did not like the story format and indicated they would skip the story and go to the recommendations at the end. They felt it was missing specifics such as



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English Groups

how long to have your child brush and parents should not lick pacifiers to clean them. They also felt the title was plain.

What would you change to make more appealing to parents?

Common theme, do not put in a story format, just get to the point. Use pictures of a healthy mouth and a mouth with lots of decay from baby bottle use.

What is this booklet telling you to do?

- Don't put baby to bed with a bottle.
- Overall dental care for my child.



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Spanish Groups

Baby's Teeth

“When we say, ‘baby’s teeth’, what comes to mind?”

The participants associated baby's teeth with pain of new teeth coming in. No mention of older children and “baby teeth”. The participants starting asking questions like, when should first dental appointment be? When do you start brushing baby's teeth?

“Are baby’s teeth as important as adult teeth? Explain why or why not.”

A majority of the participants felt “baby's teeth” were as important as adult teeth. Several spoke of healthy teeth and not sick kids. They discussed how cavities will make children sick if they are not fixed. The families discussed baby bottles and how putting cool aide or juice in them will hurt baby's teeth. A father shared his concern for his children's teeth and not wanting their mouths to look like his when they get older.

“When should parents start brushing their baby’s teeth?”

"When the first tooth comes in," was the most common response. There was some mention of cleaning baby's gums after eating with cotton or finger.

Fluoride and Brushing

“What is fluoride?”

Most common response was a vitamin. The majority of participants were not sure what fluoride was. They knew that the dentist puts fluoride on children's teeth.

“Why is fluoride important for your family’s teeth?”

The participants felt fluoride prevented tooth decay and made teeth stronger. They talked as a group about where to get fluoride toothpaste.

“When should we brush our teeth?”

The majority of parents felt that we should try to brush our teeth at least two times a day. A small number felt after sugary foods and before bed.

“When should our children brush their teeth?”

The majority felt the same as adults, two times a day. Because kids are in school all day they can not brush three times a day. But parents spoke of it being important to try for three times a day.



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Spanish Groups

Dental Visits

When should parents take their child to a dentist?

The participants had mixed opinions on when a child should see a dentist. Responses ranged from when first teeth come in, 6 months, 1 year. They seemed to depend on reminders from the dental office.

How often should parents take their child to the dentist for check ups?

Every six months to once a year. Many just depend on the reminders from the dental office.

Do you have a family dentist?

The majority of the participants do not have a family dentist. They see whoever has openings. The group was concerned about no emergency room for dentist care. They spoke of their personal experiences taking months to get in to fix an injured tooth or cavity.

In your opinion, what should we say to parents to encourage them to take their child to the dentist for check ups?

Theme's heard:

- It is very important to take your child in for healthy teeth. "In our country we don't go to the dentist."
- Provide insurance information for those who do not have coverage.
- Tell them how long the appointment will take.
- Explain why there may be more dental appointments in the future.
- Be upfront on costs. Very confusing. Will be embarrassed if the bill is more money than I have.
- Explain why parents are discouraged from going in with their child.

We asked parents to rank the following by raising their hand if they agree or like the message.

10/11 Flyers sent home with children
 0/11 Brochures in public offices
 7/11 Radio advertisements 96.3 La Campesina
 11/11 School newsletters
 3/11 Newspaper El Mundo, Nickelsaver, The Sun

Conclusions:

They do not read brochures in public offices. They laughed and joked about them as being very bad and boring. They spent a lot of time talking about their local radio



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station La Campesina's information hour at 10:00 am every day. Different people come in and talk. They also like health information to come home with their children.

Raise your hand if you like the following message. Choose only one.

5/11 Protect your baby's teeth with fluoride.

1/11 Protect your baby's smile with fluoride.

5/11 Protect your baby's teeth by brushing them with fluoride toothpaste.

Conclusions:

They did not like the second message, "Protect your baby's smile with fluoride" doesn't show how important fluoride is.

Raise your hand if you like the following message. Choose only one.

11/11 Prevent baby bottle tooth decay. Don't put baby to bed at night or nap time with a bottle.

0/11 Baby's teeth can get hurt when baby is given a bottle at bedtime.

0/11 Protect your baby's teeth. Don't put baby to bed at night or nap time with a bottle.

0/11 Don't hurt your baby's teeth. Never put juice in your baby's bottle.

Conclusions:

They like the first message, very clear and explains why. They had a conversation about juice in bottles. A few mothers did not know that juice in bottles can cause decay.

Raise your hand if you like the following message. Choose only one.

9/11 Take your child to the dentist for a check up at least once a year.

2/11 Don't wait until your child's mouth hurts. Take your child to the dentist for regular check ups.

Conclusions:

The first statement is easy to understand.

Booklet: *A Healthy Mouth for Your Baby (italics)*

What did you like most about it?

Fluoride information. That is was a story. Didn't know our water could have fluoride in it. The information on not giving our kids so much sugar.

What did you like least about it?

No one had a comment. They really liked the format and the story.



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Spanish Groups

What would you change to make more appealing to parents?

Make a list of foods good for teeth. Make a similar story but for kids.

What is this booklet telling you to do?

- Do not give bottles to babies while sleeping. Protect your child's teeth. Call to make an appointment, don't let it go.



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Overall Conclusions and Recommendations

When parents ranked the messages they clearly did not like messages in a negative context, such as “Don’t hurt your child’s smile” or “Don’t wait until your child mouth hurts”. Yet during their conversations the majority of the participants recommended using negative messaging or images of tooth decay.

The English group did not like the story format of the booklet. Yet the Spanish group ranked it quite high.

The Spanish group heavily relies on the radio for information where the English group did not have a preference between print and radio. Multiple formats for each message would be recommended for both groups. They do not like brochure racks, they laughed and rolling their eyes.

Parents from the English and Spanish focus groups are very concerned that they will not have enough money to pay for the services. They are concerned for their children’s oral health; however it is not top priority to seek out preventative services as much as repair dental work.

- When using negative messages use caution in pointing blame on parents.
- Continue to use the Spanish booklet. Expand it to a radio spot.
- The English booklet should not be used but rather a short clear fact sheet or brochure with just the main messages.
- Develop estimates of dental costs in Grant County.